

Solution to The Problem of Existence

The problem of existence is the insecurity of life. Every human being is aware of his or her existence, but he/she is also aware of the impending death, which can come at any moment. This is the insecurity of life.

Most people like to forget this reality of life and escape into fantasy and build castles in the air, looking for a utopia, where there is eternal life and eternal happiness. This is what they call HOPE. They think Buddhists are beyond the threshold of hope, because the Buddhists prefer to face the reality of insecurity and find a solution to this problem of existence.

Buddha, the Awakened One, is the one who found a solution to the problem of existence, which modern existentialists are talking about. The solution was to awaken from the dream of existence. This means existence is not a fact. It is only a dream. Existence is not a rational concept but a mistaken notion. We are only dreaming that we exist. The Buddha broke the foundation of the problem of existence, which is "existence."

The existentialist says: "Existence precedes Essence." But the Buddha said: "Experience precedes Existence." The foundation of conscious life is experience, which is perception and conception. This was why the Buddha said, "The world, the beginning of the world, the end of the world, and the way to the end of the world is in this fathom long body itself with its perceptions, and conceptions." This means this mental process clouded by emotions is the Creator of the world, as the Buddha exclaimed immediately after his Awakening:

"Numerous births in this cycle of lives (*sansara*)
I was running in search of the Creator
But never did I meet him, that's awful;
O painful is birth again and again.

O Creator I saw you, no more will you create,
Broken are your supports, your structure is destroyed.
The mind has stopped creating,
The emotions have ceased."

(Buddha)

Buddhism

Buddhism is what was taught and practiced by the greatest Sage that India ever produced, Siddharta Gotama, the Buddha. Strictly speaking, it was not his teaching but the eternal truth rediscovered by him. Buddha is not the name of a person but a title meaning Awakened-One.

Some take Buddhism to be a religion; others regard it as a philosophy. If we carefully examine the earliest records we would see that it should best be described as a psychology or even more appropriately, a psychotherapy. It does deal with religious as well as philosophical, social and individual problems, yet it does so by first bringing them into the field of psychology and solves them as psychological problems. Buddhism is also not a kind of mysterious mysticism as some understand it because even mystic states are understood in Buddhist psychology to be just different altered mental states. Nirvana, the ultimate aspiration of Buddhists, is not a mystic state but a state in which the mind is purged and purified of all ego conceit and all traces of attachment/greed, aversion/hatred, and delusion.

Buddhism offers its own critique of religion. In this, religion is not theocentric, centered around the idea of a creator god, but rather sees it as being centered around the interest of man. Religion is not something that has come down from heaven to fulfill a divine purpose, but something that has grown up on earth to satisfy the deepest of human needs. It is not based on divine revelation but on human discovery. It is not dependent on blind faith and worship but on the understanding of experience through the use of human intelligence. It is not based on history or a story which if proved false would tumble down, but stands on the hard rock of direct personal experience. The practice of religion is not based on the idea of punishment and reward but on selflessness and love, nor is it following the commandments of the creator, but basing one's actions on a feeling of responsibility for oneself and others.

Buddhism does not regard man as a sinner who is incapable of anything better than appealing to the creator for forgiveness. It regards man as capable of rising above all human weaknesses and cultivating a divine mind through his own efforts. One cannot be saved by any external means but he has to save himself through his own efforts and right technique developed by his mind. *The Buddha is not a savior but a guide who teaches the technique of saving oneself after having tested it himself.* The destiny of man is not controlled by the whims of a creator, but by the kind of life he leads, his thoughts, speech and actions in accordance with the law of cause and effect. One's state of mind even determines the situation in which he is reborn. The Buddha taught about rebirth but not in the reincarnation or the transmigration of permanent souls. The life after death is only a continuation of the present process of existence. The Buddha realized that our existence does not begin with this human life nor end with this life in some kind of eternal heaven or hell afterwards, but he beheld that we have been existing since beginning-less time in countless numbers of various existences according to our accumulated Kamma and will continue to do so until the whole process is understood and gradually brought to a standstill. Buddhism is a gradual path of mental evolution, where man transcends human weaknesses and attains perfection of mind and finally solves the problem of existence, attains Nibbana.

All problems in life boil down to one psychological problem called Dukkha or suffering. Suffering is not just poverty, starvation and sickness and so forth which modern man commonly talks about. It is more related to mental suffering in the form of confusion, anxiety, depression, grief, worry, restlessness and so forth which are mainly psychological states. Normally these states of mind are considered to be the fault of circumstances. This is why these are seen commonly as economic or social problems. Yet the Buddha points out that they are caused by our mental attitudes and reactions to circumstances, not by the objects or situations themselves. If we really check up inside our mind we will find this is true.

This suffering is understood in Buddhism to be the clash between ourselves and the world around us. To put it in other words, it is the clash between our desires and reality. This means that suffering is caused by unrealistic desires. Reality frustrates these desires in most cases so we wish that reality were otherwise. Our desires are insatiable. The real cause of our suffering is the unrealistic desire, not the reality that frustrates it. The real cause of the economic problem is not the absence of means to satisfy our endless wants, but the presence of these insatiable wants. So the solution of our problems in life is the eradication of these unrealistic desires which clash with reality and frustrate us and cause us unhappiness. In other words, we have to awaken from our world of dreams and come down to reality, to face and accept reality as it is. This is why Buddhism is not an other-worldly religion or a kind of escapist asceticism but a this-worldly and down to earth realism. Nibbana is not an escape into a trance state of mystical bliss, but rather perfect sanity which goes beyond the so called normality that is itself insanity, from a Buddhist point of view.

To understand Buddhism we have to understand ourselves, as it is merely a description of ourselves. What has to be done is not to examine the pages of old worn out texts, though this may be useful at the outset to find out where we have to go; nor do we have to make long excursions into outer space or make complicated mathematical calculations. The Buddha's Teachings are like routes on a map which help us to journey through the labyrinths of our own mind. When the mind is understood we have understood everything. The Buddha said, "The world, the beginning of the world, the end of the world, and the path leading to the end of the world is right here in this fathom-long body with its perceptions and consciousness."

The person who understands in this way need not worry about the problem of an after life. Buddhism is not a worry about circumstances here or hereafter, but a concern about mental states here and now. If we look after the present state of mind, the future will look after itself. Nibbana is a state of being which the mind is purified of all clinging, craving, aversions, ego-conceit, and ignorance here and now, not a trance or life after death. If Buddhism is understood and practiced by mankind, this earth would become a place of harmony and happiness; happiness not through plenty and power, but happiness through desire-less-ness and wisdom.⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ Venerable Dr. M. Punnaaji wrote the "Introduction" for *The Way to Peace and Happiness* compiled by Bhikkhu Yogavacara Rahula

Buddhism as a Psychotherapy

It is popularly thought today that Buddhism is a religion containing numerous myths, traditions and mystical practices. If we examine the original Buddhism as taught by Gautama the Buddha, we will discover that it is indeed different from this popular view.

In order to clarify this point, let me draw the reader's attention to the distinction between original Buddhism and modern Buddhist practices and belief. It is important not to confuse modern Buddhism as it is practiced in different cultures and societies with what was taught and practiced by Gotama the Buddha and his disciples. What is practiced today in most Buddhist cultures, whether Theravada or Mahayana, are mainly rituals and ceremonies associated with emotionally held traditional dogmas or world-views and objects of veneration. This type of Buddhism is not different from any other religion with different dogmas, rituals and symbols of worship, which serve mankind only in temporarily reducing the anxieties and worries of life, about the here and hereafter. Quite distinct from this modern Buddhism is Original Buddhism which was a practical solution to the basic problem of existence which is the anxiety that underlies all our daily concerns, troubles and tribulations. Without understanding this distinction, it is not possible to examine this psychotherapeutic aspect of Buddhism. Therefore, I wish to emphasize at this point that whenever I use the word "Buddhism", I refer to that original Buddhism and not to any form of modern Buddhism that is practiced by any culture today.

In speaking of the psychotherapeutic aspect of Buddhism, I have presented my position too mildly. I would prefer to say that Buddhism is entirely a psychotherapy. My hesitation in doing so, is because it would be too much of a shock to the devout ethnocentric Buddhist. Yet, I would like to remind those familiar with Buddhism that the Buddha says, in the *Anguttara Nikaya*, that it may be possible for a person to claim to have been free from physical disease even for a hundred years, but it is not possible for a person to claim to have been free from mental disease even for one day, except for an *Arahant* or a perfected disciple or a Buddha. It is recognized by all Buddhist scholars that the ultimate aim of the Buddha, according to the Pali *Nikayas*, is to produce *Arahants*. *Arahantship* was the culmination of the Original Buddhist Practice.

If the *Arahant* is the only person with perfect mental health, the aim of the Buddha was to produce mentally healthy personalities. This means that Buddhism is a psychotherapy or rather the ultimate psychotherapy. In the Pali Nikayas, the Buddha was called the "**Unsurpassable physician and surgeon**" (*anuttaro bhisakko sallakatto*) and also the "**Unsurpassable trainer of persons**" (*anuttaro purissa dhamma sarati*). Expressed in modern language, these terms may be rendered as "**the super psychiatrist**" and "**the super personality trainer**".

Let us now examine Buddhism in relation to modern psychotherapeutic concepts to find out whether this claim is true. When I examine the history of the evolution of modern psychotherapeutic concepts, I find that all modern theories and practices are centred around one important problem which is understandable in terms of the structural hypothesis presented by Sigmund Freud (in 1923). Almost all modern therapeutic systems could be described in terms of this structural hypothesis. These different systems could be broadly classified into two groups, that is, (a) those therapies that are mainly concerned with the *Id* and its expressions and (b) those that are mainly concerned with the *Ego* and its functions.

The psychologies can also be seen as affective therapies and *Ego* psychologies as cognitive therapies. It is not possible to discuss in detail these different therapies within the limits of this presentation. However, I wish to draw your attention to this all important psychological problem revealed through the structural hypothesis of Freud. The reason for my drawing your attention to these important assumptions of modern psychotherapeutic thinking is to facilitate the introduction of the Buddhist concepts that underlie the Buddhist therapeutic technique. I would not be able to do justice to this subject within the brevity of this presentation. Though there are many aspects of the therapeutic technique of the Buddha, I can summarize the teachings of the Buddha to make you aware of the basic principles on which this Buddhist psychotherapy stands. I see no better way to introduce these basic principles than to discuss the contents of the first sermon of the Buddha called the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*, appearing in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, and translated by me as "**The Revolution of the Wheel of Experience**".

The first point elaborated in the Sutta is that there are two extreme modes of living to be avoided. One is the pursuit of sensual pleasure which is bi-polarized as **seeking sensual pleasure and avoiding sensual pain** (*Kamsukallikanuyoga*). The other extreme is self exhaustion through **self-denial and asceticism** (*Attakilamatanuyoga*). Avoiding these two extremes, the Buddha teaches a **third intermediate mode of living** (*Majjima Patipada*) called the **Sublime Eight-fold Way** (*Ariya Attangita Magga*). This third intermediate way consists of an awareness of reality and is accompanied by thinking, speaking, acting and living in harmony with it.

This teaching of the Buddha could easily be understood in terms of the structural hypothesis of Freud. The pursuit of sensual pleasure is nothing but the activity of the *Id*. The special emphasis of Buddhism is on the fact that gratification of the *Id*, through seeking sensual pleasures does not lead either to mental health or happiness. This concept is not entirely in conflict with Freudian thinking because Freud recognized that emotional maturity is gained through the overcoming of the pleasure principle by the reality principle. Some modern psychologists still believe that gratification of the *Id* in some way is necessary for mental health. This of course is not entirely denied in Buddhism, as we shall subsequently see.

Self exhaustion through self denial is again, obviously, the activity of the *Super Ego*. According to Buddhism, being guided entirely by the *Super Ego* is not conducive to mental health. This too is acceptable to psychoanalytic thinking as according to Freud, a complete repression of the *Id* in this way leads to the utilization of the full psychic energy available to the *ego* in this task of repression and therefore leaves the *Ego* ineffectual for dealing with external reality. The healthy intermediate mold of living recommended by the Buddha, which is to align one's thinking and living in harmony with reality, is undoubtedly the activity of the *Ego*, from a Freudian standpoint. Since, according to Freud, maturity consists in being dominated by the reality principle, this intermediate way of the Buddha falls in line with the Freudian concept of mental health, which is also the generally accepted view of all modern psychotherapists. It is also recognized generally in modern psychotherapy that an adequate sense of reality or the ability to distinguish between the outer world and the inner world of wishes and impulses is an important indication of mental health. In severe mental illness, this ability is considered impaired or totally lost. This sense of reality is present to a greater degree in the neurotic and in the psychotic. However, modern psychologists admit that even the normal person is not perfect in this ability to distinguish reality, thus agreeing with the Buddhist position. An important aspect of the development of the sense of reality, is the ability to distinguish between '**self**' and '**not self**', or what is under one's control and what is not under one's control. Freud recognized [in 1911] that frustration of the *Id* due to the impermanence of external objects is the most significant factor in the development of the concept of self in the infant and the demarcation of the *ego* boundaries or the line that separates the 'self' from the '**not self**'.

The Buddhist psychotherapist, it must be pointed out, does not play the role of a doctor in his therapeutic practice. His role is that of the teacher. His technique of therapy is a process of education. We might even go so far as to say that Buddhism is a form of *Ego* therapy or cognitive therapy.

Through education, the patient's sense of reality is improved. The conflict between the *Id* and the *Super Ego* as well as that between the *Id* and reality is resolved through education of the *Ego*. This education is done first through verbal communication by the use of reason and secondly through the practice of meditation where the patient, or more correctly, the student, is helped to become aware of his experience within, which is observed as physical movements and tensions, feelings and emotions, and as mental images and concepts.

The first thing that the student learns is that goodness and happiness are not opposed to each other, for goodness is happiness. To put in Freudian terms, the pleasure seeking of the *Id* is not wrong or evil but true pleasure is not the pleasant sensation but inner happiness. This inner happiness is achieved through relaxation and calm rather than through stimulation of the senses, excitement, tension and release of tension. Happiness is gained through the relaxation response. In other

words, the student is enlightened about the need to pursue the goal of calm in order to satisfy all three parts of the personality, namely the *Id*, the *Super Ego* and *Ego*. The *Id* is satisfied because calmness is the way to happiness. The *Super Ego*, which seeks to do what is good and right, is satisfied because calmness is the way to be good. The *Ego* is satisfied because calmness is the realistic way to be happy and good and therefore calmness is realistic. Calmness also helps the student to get in touch with reality without interference from the wishes and impulses. This way the *Ego*, which seeks to be realistic, is satisfied.

The pursuit of this harmonizing goal of calmness which resolves the conflict within and without is called the **Sublime Pursuit** (*Ariya Pariyesana*) and this way of life is called the **Sublime Way** (*Ariya Magga*) or the **Harmonious Way** (*Samma Magga*). It is also the way of **mental health** (*Arogya*). This explanation of the Buddha's teaching in terms of modern psychological concepts is not done with a view to obtain support for the Buddhist position from modern psychology but to make the Buddhist position intelligible to the modern mind acquainted with modern psychological concepts, and to show that the Buddhist psychotherapeutic is not only relevant in the modern world but also a constructive contribution to modern psychotherapeutic thought.

The first sermon of the Buddha, which we are in the process of discussing, introduces the subject in the foregoing way, and proceeds further to discuss the basic problem of anxiety, called *Dukkha*. This anxiety, according to the Buddha, is experienced in relation to seven basic situations: 1) **birth**, 2) **old age**, 3) **disease**, 4) **death**, 5) **meeting unpleasant people and circumstances**, 6) **parting from pleasant people and circumstances**, 7) **frustration of desire**. The totality of anxiety is also presented as **an aggregate** (*khanda*) or **body** (*kaya*). It is the sum total of all experienced phenomena analyzed into five aggregates which are **personalized**, to form the experience of "**self-in-the-world**". This five-fold totality of personalized phenomena is called *Pancupadanakkhanda*. It is also called *Sakkhaya*, which means "**personalized body**". This may be compared to the concept of "**self image**" or "**self concept**" that is found in modern psychology.

This "**self-image**" which is the result of the **personalization of phenomena** is seen as a bundle of anxiety by the Buddha and this anxiety is bundled up through the process of personalization which results in the concept of "**being self**" (*bhava*). All worries, anxieties, fears and feelings of insecurity, which are basic to life, are the result of this process of **personalization** (*Upadana*) and being a *self* (*bhava*). This process of **personalization** is associated with the **feeling of power** over what is personalized. Therefore, **personalization** is also seen as the **wielding of power** (*vasavatti*). From this standpoint, in order to remove the basic anxiety that underlies human existence, it is necessary to **depersonalize** (*upadana nirodha*) the five-fold totality phenomena and remove the "**self concept**". Therefore the ultimate purpose of Buddhism is to produce an individual who is free from the emotional experience of "**self**" within. This is the one who is perfect in mental health and who is called *Arahant*, the worthy one. Though this ultimate state is rarely reached, the mental health of an individual is measured according to the degree to which the individual has lost his experience of self.

The question seems to be a matter of self-boundary or *ego* boundary from a Freudian standpoint. This is the extent to which a person identifies the things in the world as belonging to himself or as a part of himself. The abnormal person's self-boundary is greater in circumference than that of the normal one. The normal person's self-boundary is greater in circumference than that of the supernormal one. The supernormal person's self-boundary is greater in circumference than that of the sublime one. Buddha therefore recognizes two levels of being above the normal level, the **supernormal** (*uttari manussa*) and the **sublime** (*ariya*).

The personalization process is dependent on what is called *tanha*, which in **literal translation is thirst**, which is similar to the Freudian urge. This **thirst**, or *tanha*, is three-fold: **the thirst for pleasure, the thirst for existence and the thirst for non-existence**. It is interesting to note that the Freudian concept of drives which included the sexual and the self-preservative drives at first, and later proposed as the life and death drives, seems to coincide with the Buddhist concept of *tanha*. It seems that psychologists are rediscovering what the Buddha discovered 2500 years ago. Yet the aim of Buddhism goes beyond the aim of modern psychology in that a complete disappearance of *tanha* is aimed at. According to Buddhism, perfect mental health is not achieved until this thirst has been completely rooted out. Although modern psychology seems to rest satisfied by making an abnormal person normal, Buddhism aims at removing even normal mental discomfort and unhappiness by bringing about perfection of health. It is interesting to note that the Buddha recognizes nine levels of mental health above the normal stage. This is discussed in detail in a sutta in the *Anguttara Nikaya* (*A IV 44*). Of the **nine supernormal** (*uttari manussa*) levels of mental health, the ninth one which is called the **sublime level** (*ariya bhumi*) is further analyzed into four levels of personality: 1) that **Stream entrant** (*sotapanna*); 2) the **Once returner** (*sakadagami*); 3) the **Non-returner** (*anagami*); and 4) the **Worthy One** (*arahant*). Modern psychology, of course, does not seem to think that it is possible to remove this thirst or urge altogether. Yet Eric Fromm points out that Freud's ultimate aim was to remove the *Id* entirely and he quotes Freud as saying, "in place of the *Id* there shall be the *Ego*." This seems to support the Buddhist position. The first sermon of the Buddha that we are discussing goes on to explain further the technique by which this thirst is removed. This technique is called the **Sublime Eight-Fold Way** which we discussed earlier as the medial mode of living that avoids the two extremes: the pursuit of sensual pleasures, and self exhaustion through "self denial". This **Eight-Fold Way** begins with what is called *samma ditti*, which is awareness of reality by understanding three important facts of life: 1) **instability** (*anicca*), 2) **discomfort or anxiety** (*dukkha*) and 3) **impersonality** (*anatta*). *Anicca*, or **instability**, is the transitory nature of all experienced phenomena to which we become attached and which we **personalize**, thinking "**this is mine**", "this is me or myself". *Dukkha* or **anxiety** is what is experienced due to the experiencing of what has been **personalized**. This anxiety is the result of a clash between the wish for permanence and the reality of instability. Here we begin to distinguish between the wish for permanence and the fact that we do not wield any power over anything because we cannot make permanent what is impermanent. It is the recognition of the fact that we do not have power not only over external objects but also over what is within the body which is identified as self. In other words, if ownership is seen as lordship or wielding of power over what is owned, we own nothing in the world, not even

what we call ourselves. Therefore, there is no basis for the concept "**mine**" or "**myself**". In other words, the "**self concept**" is also seen as made up of our wishes or impulses. This is, in Freudian terms, reality testing or distinguishing between reality and a wish. This way we acquire the healthy sense of reality which removes all anxiety. This understanding results in an emotional state of calmness, happiness and kindness. Such an emotional state leads to good external behavior, verbal and physical, which is regarded as good socially. A life based on this perspective and this emotional state and behavior is a harmonious life. And this harmonious life has to be maintained and perfected by means of the harmonious practice.

In discussing the harmonious practice we come to another aspect of Buddhist therapy which is in line with a different kind of psychological technique from what we have just discussed. The modern psychological technique that falls in line with this practice comes under what is called the Behaviour Therapies. This practice could be described by using terms like desensitization, operant conditioning, and also the learning theory. Buddha regards even mental processes as habits of thought which have been learned and which could be unlearned by consciously stopping their repetition, and constantly practicing wholesome thoughts. What are regarded as wholesome thoughts are those thoughts that are calming. Those that excite the mind and produce tension are regarded as unwholesome.

Buddhism also recognizes that affective mental processes or emotional excitements are rooted in cognitive mental processes, such as the formation of concepts or interpretation of experiences. According to how you interpret the situation, you become emotionally excited or become calm and relaxed. These interpretations that produce excitement are always associated with a "**self-concept**" or "**self-image**". If we carry bad self-images habitually, we become habitually unhappy individuals. By practicing good thoughts we begin to eliminate these bad self-images and cultivate images of calm. The calm mind is able to observe the subjective experience objectively and this brings us to the next step which is the harmonious awareness. In the harmonious awareness, one becomes aware of the subjective experience objectively and by the constant practice of this awareness, one begins to depersonalize the subjective experience. This way the **personality perspective** (*sakkaya ditti*) is gradually removed followed by further gradual removal of all thoughts of "**I**" and "**mine**". This gradual depersonalizing process calms the mind further and leads to the experiencing of progressively deeper levels of tranquillity and happiness, leading to the perfection of mental health with the complete eradication of the experience of self within and the rooting out of thirst, and the disappearance of all anxiety for good. This ultimate state of mental health is rarely attained in modern Buddhist practice, but this is the final goal of the Buddhist as taught 2500 years ago.

These principles of Buddhist psychology could be used in the modern world and could be constructively used by modern psychotherapists. Space limitation does not allow me to discuss in detail, in the present essay, the various cases where the Buddha has used these principles in his time. For the same reason, I am unable to discuss here some of the cases in my own experience where I have used these principles. The most important of all is the use of these principles on oneself. I would like to state, in passing, that I have tested in my own experience the validity of these principles.

In discussing the **First Sermon of the Buddha** called the **Revolution of the Wheel of Experience** in this way, as the process of transformation of an individual's personality from an unhealthy one to one of health, I might appear to have strayed away from the Orthodox Theravada, Mahayana or any other Buddhist tradition. But as I pointed out earlier, I am not discussing any form of modern Buddhist standpoint or practice. I am discussing the **Original Teaching and Practice of the Buddha** as found in the earliest sources recognized by all scholars which do not belong to any modern school of thought. I hope this effort will kindle your interest in exploring further the early teachings of the Buddha. I believe that if modern psychologists make a serious study of these early teachings of the Buddha, it would become a significant turning point and breakthrough in modern psychotherapeutic thought and practice.

A Process of Personal Growth, Maturity

"Buddhist meditation, as the Buddha taught it, is a psychological technique of transcending human weaknesses and human suffering through the evolution of the human consciousness. This evolution of consciousness is a process of growth and expansion of awareness consciously achieved through a systematic psychological technique. When this gradual evolutionary growth, expansion, and unfolding of the human consciousness has reached the ultimate point of maturity, this attainment is called the "**Harmonious Full Awakening**" (*Samma Sam Bodhi*). The one who awakens in this way is called the "**Harmoniously Awakened One**" (*Samma Sam Buddha*).

The use of the term "awakening" is to indicate that this expansion of consciousness is an awakening to reality, which means, the normal human being is not fully awakened to reality. That is, the normal human consciousness is not conscious of reality. In fact, according to the Buddha, it is in conflict with reality. This is why the human being is said to be normally suffering, and the aim of Buddhism is to bring this normal suffering to an end. The term "harmonious", means freedom from conflict with reality. It is being in harmony with reality.

This also implies that this kind of awakening is not a normal experience. It is a supernormal experience. It is an awakening to a super normal reality, which is quite different from the reality that normal people experience. This supernormal awakening is therefore quite different from the normal awakening from normal sleep. The normal awakened state is, according to the Buddha, a sleep or dream or fantasy. The aim of Buddhist meditation therefore is to awaken from this dream full of suffering, into a supernormal reality, where there is a supernormal level of mental health, goodness, happiness, and truth.

Humanistic Religion Buddhism avoids the common theistic and mystical interpretation of the religious experience as "the union of the soul with God." Instead, it takes a psychological standpoint. Buddhism, being a humanistic religion, is not built around the concept of the Creator God, but is centered on human interests and speaks about human potentials. Buddhists believe that the human consciousness can evolve to a level of divine perfection. A human being who transcends the ordinary human limitations in knowledge, power and goodness, and attains to this state of perfection is called, "**God**

become" (*brahma bhuto*). This state of perfection is identical with that of the "**Harmoniously Awake One**", the **BUDDHA**.

From this Buddhist point of view, "God" is seen as the ideal of human perfection that the human being conceives, and struggles to realize through the practice of religion. When the human being does realize this ideal of perfection, he "becomes God". This "God" of the Buddhist may be seen as an anthropomorphic God, though He is not seen as the Creator of the world, or His son or messenger. This "God", from a Buddhist point of view, is seen rather as the destroyer of the world. This is because the world, as the Buddha sees it, is **an illusion** (*maya*) created by the human consciousness. It is from this illusory dream that one has to awaken, in order to be free of human suffering. Because the Buddha frees people from this illusion, he can be called the destroyer of the world.

This Buddha who is not the Creator of the world, or His son, or even His messenger, but the destroyer of the world can be misunderstood to be a Devil. But the fact that he is on the side of goodness and not on the side of evil supports the fact that he cannot be called a Devil. Buddhists honor and worship the Buddha, because Buddhists believe that He, in the human body, reached the "Supreme State of Perfection" that all religions worship, what ever be the form in which they conceive it. The Buddha is traditionally, described by Buddhists as "**the God of gods**" (*devatideva*) and as "**God by purity of mind**" (*visuddhi deva*). This is not a deification of a human being but the description of the evolution of the human being. It is also the redefinition of the term "God", and the redefinition of the term "religion" from a humanistic standpoint. From this humanistic standpoint, God does not create the human being, but the human being creates God in his own image.

Religion, defined from the Buddhist standpoint, is the struggle of the human being to solve the problem of human existence. This problem is the problem of evil, unhappiness, and death. The solution is sought through the pursuit of goodness, eternal happiness, and eternal life. This pursuit ultimately takes the form of the pursuit of the ideal of human perfection. This ideal of human perfection is seen as the perfection in goodness, happiness, and wisdom. Religion, from the theistic standpoint, has come down to earth from heaven, to solve the problem of a Creator. But from the humanistic point of view, religion has grown up on earth, to solve a human problem, through the perfection of human nature. Buddhists do not therefore speak of a "God become man", but of a "man become God". This "God" of the Buddhist therefore is a "theopsychic man" rather than an "anthropomorphic God".

The Purpose of Meditation The Buddhist meditation is not a mystical practice. Our aim is not to become mystics. This technique of meditation is for people living a secular life, as householders, doing jobs, having family responsibilities, and involved in various relationships. What such people need is freedom from stress, peace of mind, healthy relationships, self-confidence, success in life, and efficiency at work. This means, learning to gain control over the emotions that prevent them from performing their duties effectively. These problematic emotional excitements can come in the form of lust, hate, fear, worry, or anxiety. Buddhist meditation, practiced in the right way, can help one be free of emotional disturbances, so that one is free to think clearly and act rationally.

This Buddhist technique of meditation does not involve chanting mantras, exercises in concentration, or entering trance states. It involves efforts to consciously purify the mind. When the mind is purified one experiences an inner exhilaration. This exhilaration can mature into rapture. When the body relaxes, one feels comfortable. When the body is comfortable, the mind enters a state of equilibrium. When the mind is in equilibrium, kindness and compassion is experienced. Such a tranquil mind can also think clearly, resulting in intelligent behaviour.

The rapture that we refer to is not a state of emotional excitement. And the kindness or compassion that we speak of is not based on an attachment. This rapture is a state of happiness based on mental tranquility, and the kindness is a state of selflessness. According to the Buddha, emotional excitement is not true happiness, and attachment is not true love. Therefore our method of meditation is aimed at cultivating a tranquil mind and a relaxed body, resulting in the experience of happiness, comfort and kindness, accompanied by intelligent thought and action.

Samatha and *Vipassana* One often hears today of the two terms - *Samatha* and *Vipassana*. *Samatha* is the cultivation of tranquillity, and *Vipassana*, commonly translated as insight, is the cultivation of the objective awareness of the subjective mental process.

Most writers, when they describe *samatha bhavana*, think of it as practicing concentration, but true meaning of *samatha* is **not concentration**. Concentration only leads to the hypnotic state. It is well known as the Braids method of hypnosis. This wrong translation has made some people to think that *samadhi* is hypnotic trance. **Concentration** is a **mistranslation** of the term *samadhi*, which has been blindly adhered to through many generations of English translators.

The term *samadhi* literally **means balance** or **equilibrium**. The Buddha defined it as "*cittekaggata*", which means the **homogeneity of disposition** (*citta*=**disposition**; *ekaggata*=**homogeneity** or **uniformity**). This term has also been **mistranslated** as "**one-pointedness of mind**," conveying the meaning of concentration.

"Homogeneity of disposition" is the description of a mind free of conflicting emotions. That means harmony, tranquillity or equilibrium. It is therefore important to understand that Buddhist meditation does not involve concentration or hypnosis. *Samatha* meditation is not the practice of self-hypnosis, and *samadhi* is not a hypnotic trance. ***Samatha* meditation is a process of purifying and tranquilizing the mind, through a series of gradually deepening levels of tranquillity. *Samadhi* refers to this series of gradually deepening levels of emotional and mental tranquillity, achieved through a gradual reduction of experience.**

The term *vipassana* when translated as "insight" can be misleading too. This is because the term "insight" as it is used in modern psychology, carries a different meaning. In psychology, it is used to mean a sudden solution of a problem, and in psychotherapy; it is understood as, bringing into awareness of repressed emotions.

In Buddhist meditation, the term *vipassana* refers to **an experience best described as the direct awareness of the mental process of experiencing**. Experiencing here means: **seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking and feeling**.

This reflective awareness of experience is not a concept unfamiliar to the Western mind. The philosopher Leibniz referred to it as apperception. Kant distinguished between empirical and transcendental apperception. We could use the term "transcendental apperception", as Kant used it, to refer to *abhinna*, which is the ultimate result of the practice of *vipassana* meditation. One can understand this fully, however, only when one is able to experience it oneself. Until then, it will only be a theory. It is therefore not so much an experience to be conceptualized as one to be actualized. The practice of *vipassana* leads to *panna*, which occurs due to a paradigm shift, which is a shift from the "experience of existence" to the "experience of experience". It is not staying in the second paradigm but seeing experience from both points of view and gaining a broader perspective (*parinna*). This cognitive transparency which results from this **transcendental apperception**, is called **"penetrative awareness"** (Pali: *panna* ; Skrt.: *prajna*).

Analysis of Experience

Normally, we experience "existence" when we think in terms of an existing "experiencer" experiencing the existing, "object of experience". There are three parts to that experience as follows:

Experiencer (Subject)
↓
Experience
↓
Experienced (Object)

The term "**existence**" (*bhava*) refers to the apparent existence of the "**subject**" and the "**object**" of **experience**, on which are based all **emotional relationships** between the subject and the object. The normal paradigm is the experience of the existence of a subject and an object, and the relationship between them. It is to think that there is a "subject" experiencing an "object" cognitively and affectively. Through the *vipassana* meditation the meditator becomes aware of this experience as only an "**experience**", instead of as a real "**existence**" and a relationship. This means, the "**existence**" of the **subject** and the **object** is seen as an "**experience**" only, or as a mere product of the process of perception, or of experiencing.

In other words, the **subject** and the **object** are seen as "**creations of the mental process**". This means, the process of experiencing precedes the notion of the existence of subject and object, not vice versa. This may be stated as, "**experience precedes existence**". It is seeing that "**experience**" is the **ultimate foundation** of "**existence**". This uncommon paradigm may be called the "**experiencing of experience**" which is quite different from the common paradigm of the "experience of existence". This is the **paradigm shift** from "**existence**" to "**experience**". When this happens, all **subject/object relationships** are seen as **meaningless**.

This **paradigm shift** can take place only by **letting go of all attachments to objects of experience**, the **subjectively experienced "self"**, and **all relationships**, through **depersonalization**. This paradigm shift is the **freedom** from the experience of **existence**, and **all the suffering** accompanying it. This is called the "**cessation of existence**" (*bhava nirodha*). When this happens, all sufferings, fears, worries and anxieties come to an end. This is **NIBBANA**, which has been defined by the Buddha as "**the cessation of existence**" (*bhava nirodho nibbanam*).

This cessation of existence is not a death but the freedom from the dream of existence, which is an awakening to the reality of "**impersonal experience**". Therefore **Nibbana** (*Nirvana*) is the experience of the ultimate reality of impersonal experience. This idea may be confusing at the beginning, but it becomes clearer as one advances in meditation.

Meditation is a Way of Living

Very often meditation is referred to as sitting. This again is a misunderstanding due to the confusion of Buddhist meditation with the Zen practice of sitting called Zazen. It is important to emphasize here that the original Buddhist meditation was not mere "sitting". Buddhist meditation is not a physical exercise but a mental training. It is not inactivity or living in a trance like state. It is maintaining a pure and tranquil mind while in any posture. It can be done in all four postures: walking, standing, sitting and lying down. Buddhist meditation is an effort to change one's thinking, feeling and behaviour, through the constant practice of introspective awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, speech and action. It is a different way of living. The **main thing in Buddhist meditation** is to practice the **Super-normal Eight-fold Way**. This way is usually translated as the **Noble Eightfold Path**. I find the former translation more meaningful. The Pali term "*ariya*" is usually translated as "noble" but it is translated here as "supernormal" because the Buddha used this term "*ariya*" to refer to a special level of life above the normal, which he wanted his followers to rise to, in order to be free of normal unhappiness. The normal level of experience was called the "**common folk's level**" (*putujjana bhumi*), meaning ordinary level. The term that the Buddha used to refer to this teaching was "*Ariya Dhamma*", which means the "**Supernormal Experience**" (*ariya=supernormal; dhamma=experience*). When the Buddha used this term "*ariya*", he was not using this term as a synonym for the modern term "Buddhist". He was merely referring to a level of living above the normal. One who

understands and practices the teaching of the Buddha is called an "*ariya savaka*", meaning the "**hearer**" of the **Supernormal Experience**.

In other words, what the Buddha meant by the term *ariya* was a higher level of growth of the human consciousness. The **aim of Buddhist meditation is to raise the human consciousness to a higher level**. Just as the aim of modern psychotherapy is to raise an abnormal person to a normal level of thinking and living, the aim of the Buddha was to bring the normal person to a super normal level of thinking, feeling and living. It is important to understand this distinction. This is why the translation of the term "*ariya*" as **Supernormal** is **preferable**. This is why Buddhist meditation is here called a "**growth technique**", using a modern psychological term.

By practicing Buddhist meditation, one hopes to grow to a higher level of emotional maturity, where one is free of normal unhappiness. This process of growth takes place according to a natural law, and following a human technique. It doesn't happen automatically or through a supernatural power."

Become Buddhist Introduction

Practising Buddhism and being a Buddhist are two different things. You may not be a Buddhist but you can still practice Buddhism. On the other hand, you may be a Buddhist but not practice Buddhism. Quite different from both practising and being is becoming a Buddhist.

On the one extreme are the Westerners who experiment with Buddhist practice but do not become Buddhists. They miss the full benefit of the practice. On the other extreme are the Easterners, born in Buddhist countries and brought up in Buddhist cultures, who call themselves Buddhists but do not practise Buddhism. They get very little benefit, if any at all, from Buddhism. There is a third intermediate group of people, however, that avoids both extremes; that is, those who become Buddhists. They are the ones who really benefit from the teaching of the Buddha.

Those who call themselves Buddhists just because they have been born into a Buddhist family or because they practise some rituals, are mistaken. One does not become a Buddhist by birth, by practice, or even by initiation. One becomes a Buddhist by what one is. Buddhists by birth as well as non-Buddhists, practitioners of Buddhism or otherwise, can become Buddhists if they want to and know how. To do so, one has to understand what one is.

[Character Structure](#) **Character Structure**

What one is is one's character structure, which consists of one's philosophy of life, one's aim in life, what one speaks habitually, what one does habitually, and how one lives habitually. Habits are tendencies of behaviour which are perpetuated by practice; Practice means repetition. What one repeats habitually, one becomes. One repeats, however, only what one wants to be. One is what one wants to be. What one wants to be depends on one's sense of values, which in turn depends on one's philosophy of life.

An individual's character is a functional whole that is organized to reach a set goal. Every habit of thought, speech, and action is an integral part of this functional whole, which is necessary to reach this goal.

The goal, however, is always a personality. It is some self that one wants to be. To be more accurate, the goal is a visualized image of the person one wants to become.

This person one wants to become is always a person one considers to be superior in some form. One always wants to move from a state of inferiority to a state of superiority. One's goal tends to be what one perceives to be lacking in oneself. What is perceived to be superior depends on one's sense of values. These values, again, depends on one's philosophy of life.

If we want to change our habits, we can do so only by becoming a different person: by a rebirth-which means we have to change our philosophy of life. We have to change our goal in life, which will be followed by a complete reorganizing of our thought, speech, action, and life to reach a different goal. This means, we will have a new way of thinking, a new way of feeling and a new way of speaking, acting, and living. Then old habits will be dropped and new habits will be formed. Isolated habits cannot be eliminated because they are essential parts of one's character structure organized to reach a desired goal. It is only by a character transformation that one can change one's habits. This is the reason for the many failures in attempts to overcome habits like eating, drinking, smoking, etc.

[Buddhist Character Structure](#)

Buddhist Character Structure

Many of the above concepts are accepted by modern psychologists, especially the Adlerians and Behaviorists and in modern psycho-cybernetics. But more than twenty five centuries ago, the **Unsurpassable Trainer of Personality** (*anuttaro purisadamma sarati*), the **Buddha**, the **Awakened One**, formulated a system of transforming character based on these principles. When one examines this system carefully, one realizes that Buddhism is a system of personal growth and inner transformation. This system is called the **Sublime Eightfold Way**. The Sublime Eightfold Way (commonly translated as the Noble Eightfold Path) is laid down as follows:

1. Harmonious Perspective
2. Harmonious Aspiration
3. Harmonious Speech
4. Harmonious Action
5. Harmonious Lifestyle
6. Harmonious Practice
7. Harmonious Attention
8. Harmonious Equilibrium

This **Sublime Eightfold Way** is not a set of commandments or rules of living as some describe it. It is a description of the character structure of the true Buddhist. One has to acquire this character structure in order to become a Buddhist. A change in character is rarely a sudden change, though sometimes it could appear to be so. After a long period of struggling to understand, the harmonious perspective may dawn upon one when the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle suddenly click into place. When the harmonious perspective appears, the rest of the structure falls into place. The individual's life becomes reoriented and reorganized to reach the very special goal of inner calm called *Nibbana*.

[Internal and External Conflicts](#)

Internal and External Conflicts

Harmonious Perspective is the perspective that does not create any conflict within or without. Conflict within is the conflict between our **emotional impulses** (*asava*) and our sense of good and bad associated with **fear and shame** (*hiri-ottappa*). Conflict without is the conflict between our impulses and external reality, physical and social.

These emotional impulses are basically of two kinds: those that seek **pleasure** (*loba*) and those that avoid **pain** (*dosa*). These two kinds of emotional impulses represent the positive and the negative aspects of **pleasure seeking** (*kama-sukhallikanu-yoga*). These emotional impulses are also blind and they make us blind to **reality** (*moha*). These three drive us toward the goal of pleasure and seek immediate satisfaction.

If one's pleasure-seeking emotions are powerful, one might become a criminal. If, on the other hand, one's fear and shame become powerful one tends to become inhibited and deny oneself pleasure through an **ascetic lifestyle** (*atta-kilamatanu-yoga*). If one cannot resolve the conflict one way or the other, one might become neurotic or psychotic, running away from reality into a fantasy world.

The outer conflict occurs when the search for pleasure comes in conflict with other people or the physical environment itself. We cannot always have pleasure and we cannot always avoid pain. Sometimes our enjoyment of pleasure can hurt other people. Often things don't happen as we want. Our impulses are blind and our reason comes in conflict with our impulses. The conflict between the impulses and the external environment creates frustration, anxiety, and unhappiness.

The search for pleasure also results in possessiveness or **personalization**; we like to own our pleasures and make them permanent. By owning or personalizing, we build and expand a 'self' and 'personality' or 'ego'. This **personalization** is also accompanied by a desire for the permanent existence of what we call 'ourselves' or our 'own.' We like what we personalize not to grow old or die. Youthfulness is pleasant to us, while old age is unpleasant. Health is pleasant to us, while disease is unpleasant. Life is pleasant to us, while death is unpleasant. Parting from the pleasant and meeting the unpleasant is frustrating. Not being able to have things as we want is a frustration. The cause of this suffering is undoubtedly unrealistic desire or emotional impulses which lead to **personalization**.

It is clear that blind impulse is the culprit. It is this blind impulse that clashes with our sense of goodness and with our reason and external reality. It is only by gaining control over this impulse that this conflict can be resolved. Some method had to be found to gain control over this impulse without creating suffering in the process.

[The Value of Calmness](#)

The Value of Calmness

This all important method was discovered by the Buddha twenty-five centuries ago. This method is to unify the personality by reorganizing it to reach a harmonious goal that does not come in conflict with reality. This is to seek the new and special goal - the goal of **inner calm** (*ajjhata santi*). To achieve inner calm, one has to realize that calmness is goodness, happiness, and realism.

It should be noted that emotional excitement, which is accompanied by tension, is not a state of comfort or pleasure. It is only the release of tension, or the state of relaxation, that is pleasant. Satisfying desire is pleasant only because of the release of tension. The presence of desire, on the other hand, is unpleasant because it is accompanied by tension. It is to get rid of this discomfort of tension, and to obtain the comfort of relaxation that we seek satisfaction of desires. By reaching inner calm and relaxation, the goal of experiencing pleasure and happiness is attained without first experiencing tension.

Calm is also the way to goodness. The emotional impulse which comes in conflict with society and good principles is evil. The calming of these impulses is, therefore, goodness. This means that the aim of our sense of goodness is also achieved by seeking calm. Because the emotional impulse comes in conflict with reality, it follows that calmness gets us into harmony with reality. The aim of our rational thinking is to be in harmony with reality. Harmony with external reality, as well as the harmony with our reason, is achieved through the cultivation of inner calm.

This way, the whole personality is brought into harmony internally and externally by seeking calm. Understanding the problem of life and existence and the importance of seeking calm, is gaining harmonious perspective. When this special perspective is gained, the right sense of values is acquired. This gives a new direction to life. Then our life is reorganized to achieve a different goal. This way a personality transformation takes place; the character of the individual is changed; and mental health and happiness is achieved.

The aim of Buddhism is to transform the personality in this way. This transformation is also a process of growth. This is why Buddhism is also a growth technique. The growth takes place in four stages: **devotion** (*saddha*), **discipline** (*sila*), **detachment** (*caga*), and **depersonalization** (*panna*). When we speak of the practice of Buddhism, it is necessary to speak about these stages of growth. Each individual practices at his or her own level.

When one has acquired harmonious perspective, one has *saddha*. *Saddha* represents our sense of values. It is the appreciation of calm, which is goodness, happiness, and realism.

To appreciate is to value, to esteem, to hold in high regard or consider to be superior. When one appreciates calm, one appreciates the **Buddha**, the **Awakened One**; the *Dhamma*, the **Experience of the Awakened One**, and the **Sangha**, the **Society of followers of the Awakened One**. This triad (the **Buddha**, *Dhamma*, and *Sangha*) is called the “**Triple Gem**” (*ratanattaya*), because a “gem” represents value. Buddhists consider this triad to be the greatest thing in the world. They also call it the “**Triple Refuge**” (*tisarana*) because it is the refuge of the Buddhist in this world of suffering.

[Buddhist Devotional Practices](#)

Buddhist Devotional Practices

Devotional practices in Buddhism are exercises that develop **appreciation** (*saddha*). Buddhists do not pray to the Buddha but worship the Buddha. Prayer is adoration, confession, supplication or thanks-giving. To **worship** (worth + ship), on the other hand, is to **show great respect, reverence, or admiration**; it is to highly esteem or hold in high regard. For Buddhists, it is to **recognize the greatness or superiority of the Buddha**. This worship is a psychological exercise to develop *saddha* (appreciation), the Buddhist **sense of value** that gives new direction to life.

Buddhist worship is not, as some people may think, a meaningless ritual practiced by less-intellectual individuals. It can become so, however, if it is done without understanding. The purpose of Buddhist worship is to get one moving in the right direction. It is a reorientation. It is a kind of meditation or a psychological exercise. The idea is that we move in the direction of what we consider superior and worthwhile. Worship reminds us of the Buddhist sense of values -- we become what we worship.

Buddhist worship consists of bows, offerings, recitations, silent meditations, sharing of merit, and aspiration, each of which has a very important psychological meaning and purpose.

The bow, or obeisance, is an important practice which starts the initiate in the right direction. It is the recognition of the greatness of the Buddha and the admission of one's own inadequacy in comparison to the Buddha. It is saying, in effect, "Great lord, I recognize your greatness in comparison to me." This is humbling oneself before the Buddha. It makes the individual aware of his or her position on the ladder of progress. The bow, or prostration, is a conscious admission of one's inferiority to the superior position of the Buddha. It cultivates a healthy humble feeling, quite different from a morbid inferiority complex.

This recognition of one's inadequacy spurs one towards a superior state. Buddhists do not look upon themselves as sinners and helpless weaklings before a superior, all powerful, supernatural being who can never be equalled by anyone. They believe that everyone can reach the state of perfection reached by the Buddha. This exercise of bowing is only a method of programming our mind to reach the goal of perfection. It reminds us of our goal and the need to pursue it. It helps us to visualize the goal with respect and appreciation. Modern psycho-cybernetic theory, which compares the human mind to an automatic goal-seeking machine, is a very precise description of how Buddhist practice works. Buddhist worship is a kind of hero worship. If we worship those we consider to be heroes, we gradually become like them; if we worship (respect and admire) criminals, we become criminals ourselves; if we worship saints, on the other hand, we tend to become saints. The basic principle is that we become what we worship. We become the ideal we worship. Buddhists are not idol worshippers, but are ideal worshipers.

The bow is the physical expression of *saddha*, the mental state of reverential appreciation of the Buddha. It was William James who said, "Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not." If we understand this psychological principle, we understand how the bow can help cultivate *saddha* within us. By acting out *saddha* in the bow, we produce the feeling of *saddha* within us. This *saddha* is what initiates the movement towards our goal.

All other parts of the worship, such as offerings, recitations and meditation, help cultivate *saddha*: The offering of light, which symbolizes wisdom, is a way of honouring the enlightenment of the Buddha. The offering of incense, which symbolizes virtue, is to honour the Buddha's virtues. Flowers represent the pleasures of the world, which are transient, their offering represents the sacrifice of worldliness in favour of the inner peace of *Nibbana*.

Offering food symbolizes our gratitude to the Buddha for giving us his teachings, even though what we give is not worth even a thousandth part of what Buddha gave to us.

When our lives have been reoriented through the cultivation of *saddha* or the reverential appreciation of the goal of perfection of human nature, our speech, action and lifestyle fall in line with this goal and our life begins to move in the direction of this goal. When this happens, we have become Buddhists. Now we see, how important it is to cultivate *saddha*.

The Use of Images **The Use of Images**

To place the use of images in Buddhist worship in its proper perspective, we must recognize that people use images in their lives all the time, sometimes to their disadvantage, but often to their great advantage. Even those who think they can do without images cannot help being influenced by them.

It is quite natural for human beings of all cultures to use images of various types. Why are great national monuments and statues built? Why do people pay thousands of dollars for paintings and sculpture? Why do people buy cameras? If images were not of any value, would the camera industry be so prosperous today? The Chinese say, "One picture is worth ten thousand words." Modern advertisers know this principle very well and use it to their advantage. Buddhists use Buddhist images to their advantage as well.

Buddhists are not naive enough to think that statues have life in them. They only use them as symbols. They use the image of the Buddha only as an external representation of an internal mental image. The external image enhances the internal mental image and the feeling associated with it. Statues are a kind of non-verbal language, like music, used to express certain ideas. It might be worthwhile to remember that we use verbal symbols all the time when we are speaking, writing, or even thinking.

Harmonious Behaviour **Harmonious Behaviour**

When one becomes a Buddhist, one's change in speech, action, and lifestyle is called *sila*. *Sila* is not merely self-restraint or discipline. No discipline is needed once our direction in life has been changed. We then go in that direction because we want to go. Discipline and restraint would be needed to stop us from going in that direction or to change our habits of behaviour. Even this would not be successful unless we changed our direction again.

A behaviour change imposed upon one by an external agency is called *silabbata-paramasa* in Buddhism. This Pali term is commonly mis-translated as "rites and rituals." However, *sila* means "behaviour"; *bata* means "vow"; and *paramasa* means "taking as something external" (*parato arnasati*). So *silabbata-paramasa* should really be translated as "behaviour that is imposed upon one", not as "rites and rituals." If we consider the new behaviour to be something imposed on us from outside, and not something that is the natural result of our changed outlook, it would be *silabbata-paramasa*. Some examples of this would be: trying to stop smoking because circumstances force us to do so, or because the doctor said it must be done; trying to follow commandments or precepts for fear of punishment by a wrathful God, or because Buddha said to do so; or not drinking alcohol because the government has issued a law of prohibition against it. This externally imposed behaviour change is not the goal of Buddhists.

A Buddhist believes that all beings are basically good. "The mind, oh disciples, is naturally pure. It becomes defiled due to foreign impurities." An enlightened Buddhist would never consider himself a "sinner," thus producing a bad self-image, which would prevent him from seeking purity. He would, rather, picture himself as an inherently good and calm person who could sometimes temporarily lose his equilibrium.

Good behaviour is something positive; it is not merely refraining from bad behaviour. It means becoming interested in others. It is the ability to consider others to be as important as oneself. It is being able to share things with others and care for others. It is treating others as a mother would treat her beloved children. It is including others in one's interest, without excluding any individual because he or she is "bad." It is being able to forgive other's faults. It is being able to treat everyone equally. Good behaviour, in Buddhism, is based on a good state of mind. Therefore it is necessary to cultivate a good mind, which is a calm mind. This is how meditation comes into Buddhism. Meditation becomes a natural thing when your mind is oriented towards the goal of calmness. Calmness is not opposed to interest in others. It is the calm mind that can become interested in others. The mind that is not calm is self-absorbed and not able to become interested in others. Selfless love is not emotional excitement, as some people think it is. All emotions are self-centred. Selflessness cannot therefore be an emotion. It can only be seen as the state of calm. This is why the cultivation of calm in meditation cannot make a person apathetic. Calmness can only result in empathy, the ability to enter into another person's feelings as if they were one's own. This is what makes a person good.

Calmness is not only selfless concern for others, it is also detachment. Attachment is self-centered, and is an emotion. This attachment is what many people call love. This kind of love disappears in calmness, but this is not something to be worried about. Attachment is, actually, what prevents selfless love. If we become attached to a person or thing, we tend to be protective and possessive, and thus become antagonistic towards others. Therefore, detachment and selflessness go together. In order to develop selfless love, we have to give up selfishness and attachment. This is the meaning of renunciation in Buddhism.

Renunciation and selfless concern for others brings about happiness. Unhappiness is due to a concern with oneself and one's needs. By giving up self-concerns, one becomes happy. This calmness and stability of mind is what is called *samadhi* (equilibrium).

[Depersonalization](#)

Depersonalization

The final stage in the development of the path of Buddhism is depersonalization. This is when we are able to give up what has been personalized by seeing that there is nothing that we can call our own. When we see that all things are **unstable** (*anicca*), **anxiety-producing** (*dukkha*), and **impersonal** (*anatta*), we are free of all suffering. This is because there are no possessions or "self" to worry about. This **depersonalization** is what makes an individual completely **selfless**. When this happens one can even face death without anxiety. **This complete freedom from anxiety is the aim of Buddhism.**

What is Meditation

Introduction

Buddhist meditation, as we teach it, is not a mystical practice; we are not teaching people to become mystics. This technique of meditation is for people who are living a secular life as householders, workers, having responsibilities, and who are involved in various relationships. What such people need is freedom from stress. They need peace of mind, healthy relationships, self-confidence, success in life, and efficiency at work. This means, learning to gain control over the emotions that prevent one from thinking rationally or acting intelligently. These problematic emotional excitements come in the form of anger, lust, worries, fears, and anxieties. The form of Buddhist meditation we teach helps one free the mind of emotional disturbances and help one to think clearly and act rationally.

[What One Can Gain](#)

What one can gain

This technique of meditation does not involve magical ceremonies like chanting mantras, exercises in concentration, or entering trance states. It involves effort to consciously purify the mind, calm the mind and relax the body. When the mind is purified, one experiences an inner happiness, a physical comfort, and a kindness and compassion that one has never experienced before. The happiness that we refer to is not a state of emotional excitement, but a tranquil state of the mind. The kindness and compassion we teach is not an attachment, but a state of selflessness. Emotional excitement is not true happiness, and attachment is not true love. Happiness and kindness are attributes of the pure and tranquil mind. Therefore this method of meditation is aimed at cultivating a relaxed body, and a pure and calm mind, resulting in the experience of selfless happiness and the genuine kindness of heart.

[Samatha and Vipassana](#)

Samatha and Vipassana

You may have heard of the two terms - *samatha* and *vipassana*. This type of meditation is based on the teachings of the Buddha. *Samatha* is the cultivation of tranquility of mind, and *vipassana* is the cultivation of intelligence. Most people when they speak of *samatha* meditation, they think it is practicing concentration, but true *samatha* is not concentration. Concentration only leads to the hypnotic state. *Samatha* is not the practice self-hypnosis. Properly understood, *samatha* means purifying and calming the mind.

[Hypnosis](#)

Hypnosis

Hypnosis is a term coined by Dr. Braid a Physician from England. His method of producing the hypnotic state was to get a person to concentrate. Concentration needs effort and effort means tension, which is the opposite of relaxation and calm. When one keeps concentrated sufficiently long, the mind and body reacts by entering a kind of sleep, which is different from the normal sleep, and that is the hypnotic sleep. It is half way between waking and sleeping. It is a very passive state, which could be explained as a regression to childhood, where the child lets the mother do what ever she likes to the child, like bathing and cleaning. It is entering an uncritical state of the mind, where one begins to receive uncritically any suggestion given by the hypnotist. Another person can implant ideas in one's mind, when under the hypnotic state, which will be accepted uncritically and carried out without question, even without one's knowledge. Faith and trust is a condition that prepares the mind to enter the hypnotic state. The hypnotic state is not a state of mental purity. One can be emotionally exited in the hypnotic state.

[Hypnotic Hallucination](#)

Hypnotic Hallucination

Some people are prone to enter the hypnotic state easily because they naturally remain in an uncritical state most of the time. They tend to believe anything they are told by an authority. Such people can be easily hypnotized. Sometimes a person might enter the hypnotic state easily when in a religious environment like a church, temple or synagogue. Once a person is in the hypnotic state, he/she can begin to hallucinate. Hallucinations can be in the form of seeing lights, seeing the Buddha, seeing God, or even experiencing out of body movements, and many other such experiences. What is seen or hallucinated depends on what the mind unconsciously expects. It is like dreaming. Someone from outside can suggest what is to be seen, while in the hypnotic state; or someone can suggest it before entering the hypnotic state. These suggestions are not only accepted, they are also carried out in the body and the mind. This is how hypnotic healing is done. The suggestions that lead to hallucinations are also accepted as truth. The hypnotic state can be produced by another person or it can be produced by oneself.

[Distinction between Hypnosis and Samadhi](#)

Distinction between Hypnosis and Samadhi

Therefore it is extremely important to distinguish between hypnosis and *samadhi*, and learn to avoid entering the hypnotic state, before we begin meditation. This is the meaning of the well known Zen saying, "If you see the Buddha on the way, kill him." "Buddha," there, is the hallucination. "Kill," there means, destroy it. There is nothing bad about hypnosis, unless it is used for bad purposes. Sometimes it can even be used for medical purposes like healing some sicknesses. In ancient times, hypnosis was used by doctors to anesthetize patients before operation. Some use it in psychotherapy. Yet true Buddhist meditation is not hypnosis. *Samadhi* is not concentration or self hypnosis.

[Vipassana](#)

Vipassana

The term *Vipassana* is commonly translated as "insight," but this term is also frequently misunderstood because it is commonly translated as "insight." *Vipassana* is often confused with intuition because of this. The term *vipassana* is also often confused with the psychological meaning of the term "insight." In psychology, insight is understood as a sudden understanding of the solution to a problem. In psychotherapy it is understood as bringing to consciousness the unconscious motive of a conscious action. *Vipassana*, on the other hand, is the introspective awareness of the subjective experience. This subjective experience consists of one's reaction to environmental stimulation. This reaction can be broadly analyzed into four parts: sensory perception, thinking, feeling, and acting. *Vipassana*, therefore, is to see this experience in its parts, as an impersonal process of activity, without a "self" being involved. In other words, *vipassana* is "systematic introspection," resulting in the realization of the "impersonality" of all phenomena. Therefore *vipassana* can be translated as "in-sight," provided we know what it means; namely, "mental vision focused within." Yet the use of this word can be misleading because it is often used to mean seeing the inner essence of an object perceived, while *vipassana* is seeing the inner subjective experience of perception itself. *Vipassana* is an introspective method of removing the notion of "self" from the mind, in order to free the mind of selfishness.

[Selfishness](#)

Selfishness

Selfishness is due to self-centered emotions. These self-centered emotions also influence the thinking process to form the concept of "self." It is true that, biologically speaking, self-centered emotions that support self-preservation is necessary for

the survival of animals, but the human being is the only animal that is aware of a "self" that can be attacked by a discourteous word or insult. That "self" is not a physical entity but an imaginary "psychic" entity, which is responsible for all quarrels, wars, and crimes in the world. This psychic "self" can be seen not only as something within the body, it can be expanded in our minds to include all the members of one's family and possessions, one's race, one's nation, or all humanity or even the whole planet earth. This is how the idea of self preservation of the human being can lead to wars between nations and even between planets. These pestilences, the wars and inhuman crimes of human society can be eliminated only by eliminating this imaginary notion of "self," and the self-centered emotions that go with it. There are three basic tendencies that must be eliminated: the emotion, the notion of self, and the unconsciousness that maintains it. By eliminating these three conditions, the human being rises to a higher level of experience, which can be called "divine" (*brahma*). This is the final aim of the teachings of the Buddha. The practice leading to the elimination of the self-centered emotions is *samatha*, and that leading to the elimination of the notion of "self" is *vipassana*. Both are eliminated by eliminating unconsciousness. This rising to a higher level of experience is called Transcendence of the ordinary human level of experience.

[Transcendence](#)

Transcendence

Very often people refer to meditation as sitting. It needs to be emphasized here that, meditation is not the practice of a ritual of just sitting. Meditation can be done while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. Meditation is a mental process, not a physical one. The aim of meditation is to return to the natural state of calmness that we lost, when we started reacting to environmental stimulation. Normally our mind is disturbed because we constantly react to environmental stimulation of our senses. Meditation has to be seen as an effort to stop this and be calm and relaxed, by not making any effort. It is an effort to transcend this animalistic weakness of reacting to stimulation. This is why we like to call Buddhist meditation a growth technique, rather than the mere obedience to rules of conduct or the practice of rituals of sitting or walking, though these postures of the body can be profitably used in meditation. The aim of Buddhist meditation is to raise the human consciousness to a higher level beyond the normal experience. This transcendence is achieved by following the "Sublime Eight-fold Way" (*ariya atthangika magga*), commonly translated as the "Noble Eight-fold Path."

[Growth and Maturity](#)

Growth and Maturity

The term "*ariya*" is commonly translated as "noble." The Buddha, however, used the term "*ariya*" to refer to something more than noble. What he meant was a higher evolutionary level of consciousness which could be developed through a proper technique. It is a level beyond the normal. Therefore it is more meaningful to translate it as "super-normal," or better "Sublime," rather than "noble." Just as the aim of modern psychotherapy is to raise an "abnormal" person to a "normal" level of living, the aim of the Buddha was to bring the "normal" person to a "super-normal" level. It is very important to understand this distinction between "noble" and "supernormal" or "sublime." This supernormal level is a higher level of emotional and intellectual maturity. The purpose of Buddhist meditation is to grow to a higher level of emotional and intellectual maturity, beyond the normal, and to experience a degree of happiness and kindness beyond the normal. Buddhist meditation is a method of gaining emotional and intellectual maturity through the purification of mind. *Samatha* meditation is to gain emotional maturity, and *vipassana* meditation is to gain intellectual maturity.

[Natural and Human Technique](#)

Natural and Human Technique

This process of growth takes place according to a natural law, by following a natural human technique. It does not happen due to any supernatural power. We are not depending on any external aid, not even that of a teacher or guru. This practice is based on self-reliance. It has to be done by ourselves. This is a "do-it-yourself" technique. A teacher can only show the way. The student does the practice.

Will Power

Will power

In a sense, meditation can be seen as the development of will-power, to control one's irrational emotions. Some cultures believe in a free-will that we are born with, which means that we have will-power naturally. But we know by experience that when emotion and will are in conflict, emotion wins most of the time. This means that will-power is not a power we are born with. It is only a human "potential" that has to be actualized through practice. We are not born with a fully developed will-power; it is only a potential. Biologically speaking, the human being, as a higher animal, has a more evolved brain, especially the fore-brain (the cerebrum). The difference between the human being and all the other animals is that all other animals are passively reacting to their environment. The human being has the potential to delay the reaction, to get sufficient time to think and decide which response to make in a given situation, and respond rationally instead of emotionally. It is this ability to choose the response that is called will-power. Yet every human being is not able to use this ability all the time.

Free Will and Determinism

Free will and determinism

This freedom to choose is also called "free-will." Do we really have this ability to make a choice and to act rationally always? Unfortunately, this ability to choose is not a capacity that is fully developed in the normal human being. This is why we make so many stupid mistakes in life, about which we repent later. Often we want to do something in the right way, but we find ourselves doing just the opposite. This is because our will-power has not been fully developed. Buddhist meditation, when properly practiced, is the way to develop our will-power, or free will. This ability is not usable until it is developed. Strictly speaking, it is not even a power but a capacity that is dependent on the necessary conditions. In other words, it is based on the principle of determinism. The debate about free-will and determinism has been going on for a long time. Yet these two ideas are not in conflict; free-will is deterministic. It is only by recognizing this fact that it becomes possible to develop this capacity to choose, using a proper technique based on the principle of determinism.

Organism and Environment

Organism and Environment

In order to understand this fully, it is necessary to go into the physiology of emotional behavior. We are organisms born with senses: the eyes, the ears, nose, tongue, and the body. When the senses are stimulated, a reaction occurs in the organism as a whole. For example, when light falls upon the eye, sight occurs, and this is a reaction. This sight is only seeing a meaningless field of different intensities and varieties of color. Our next step is to make meaning out of what we see. This is done by the intellect, and in doing so, we construct objects and their relationships. Once an object has been constructed, it is interpreted as pleasant unpleasant or neutral. This interpretation is followed by an emotional reaction to what is seen, in the form of a desire, hatred, or fear. This emotional reaction is but a disturbance in the body, created by a hormone that is secreted into the blood that carries the hormone to all parts of the body, causing changes in the activity of different organs in the body. Every emotion is accompanied by muscular tension, among other changes in the body. This tension is experienced as discomfort, which compels an individual to seek the release of tension in action, to obtain what is desired, to get rid of what is hated, or to run away from what is feared. This is the completion of the reaction.

Reaction and Response

Reaction and Response

This reaction has three main stages: the cognitive, affective, and active. The cognitive is just the mental creation of the object and the interpretation. The affective is the emotional reaction or excitement that results. The release of tension in action is the behavioral part of the reaction. Normally, all animals below the human level are passively reacting to their environment in this way. The human being has the latent ability to delay the release of tension in action, to get sufficient time to decide which response to make in a given situation. By thinking rationally, the human being is potentially able to decide upon the right response, and make the proper response by acting rationally. This is what we call will-power.

[Evolution](#)

Evolution

This is what one learns from our lessons at the center and during our retreats. It is learning how to act rationally instead of emotionally. One will be provided with the tools to work on oneself. Working on oneself is one's own job, not the teacher's. The teacher's job is only to show the tools that you already have but do not know that you have them. The teacher also can tell you how to use them. Our hope is that you will be able to work on yourself and grow, evolve, and be transformed. The degree of transformation, and quality of life experienced is the measure of your progress. What we look for is growth and transformation, not mere insight as a view. This is why we do not call this method of meditation "insight meditation." We also do not expect visions or hallucinations of any kind. If what you gain from a retreat is only more will-power, and a sense of peace of mind, then you have won a degree of success.

[Sublime Eightfold Way](#)

Sublime Eightfold Way

It is very important to understand that this technique of meditation is a method of transforming oneself from a self-centered personality into a selfless one, by following the Sublime Eight-fold Way. There are eight steps to be followed. They are as follows:

1. Harmonious Perspective
2. Harmonious goal orientation
3. Harmonious speech
4. Harmonious action
5. Harmonious lifestyle
6. Harmonious Exercise
7. Harmonious attentiveness
8. Harmonious equilibrium

[Harmonious Perspective](#)

Harmonious Perspective

The first step is to acquire the harmonious perspective. The harmonious perspective is the perspective that brings about harmony internally and externally. This is a perspective, not merely a right view or right understanding. This is a different way of looking at life, yourself, the world, and your relationship to the world. It is seeing things in a different way, which does not create conflict internally or externally.

[Conflict with Reality](#)

Conflict with Reality

The first thing we must do is to understand that our emotions come in conflict with the reality of change and separation in the world. Our emotions seek pleasure and avoid pain. This means, they are seeking permanent pleasure. This is not possible because pleasure is impermanent and pain cannot be avoided altogether. Emotions are also possessive and self-centered. We do not really possess anything in the world because all relationships are impermanent. Our self-centeredness

is futile because we can never really preserve a permanent identity or self, because we change constantly, both physically and mentally and we cannot avoid death. This pursuit of eternal pleasure and eternal life is based on blind emotions, and not through clear thinking. It is important to understand that our emotions come in conflict with reality, and it is unwise to be carried away by them. It is wiser to be dominated by reason than by emotion.

Unrealistic Pursuits

Unrealistic Pursuits

Let us consider a person who is attracted to money or wealth. He may think that becoming wealthy is the greatest thing in the world. So he begins to earn wealth. When he makes a loss he becomes terribly unhappy. Another might think that social position or power is greater than wealth. He might sacrifice wealth to gain social position and power. When he loses his position and power, he comes to great discomfort as a result. Still another might believe that popularity or good name is better than riches or even social position and power. The latter might sacrifice wealth and high social position to become popular and to secure a good name. Such a person might be blamed and lose the good name some way or other, and as a result suffer much pain of mind. Another person might think, "What is the use of wealth?" "What is the use of social recognition or power?" "What is the use of popularity and a good name?", "What I need is sensual pleasure and keep on enjoying sensual pleasure, thinking that is the greatest thing!" That person too will be thoroughly disappointed when he/she ceases to get the pleasures he/she craves for. Different people have different ideas of what is good or great or superior.

Sense of Values

Sense of Values

According to each person's sense of values, each person will feel inferior, superior or equal. If we think that wealth is superior, then the moment we meet a wealthier person, we may begin to compare ourselves to them and feel inferior. Or if a person thinks that high social position is superior, they may feel inferior in the presence of any person who is greater in social position. Likewise, if a person thinks that popularity is the greatest thing, that person begins to feel inferior upon meeting a person who is more popular than himself or herself. If a person thinks that enjoying sensual pleasure is the greatest thing, then that person will feel inferior in the presence of some one that is enjoying more sensual pleasures. This is how people feel inferior or superior

True Happiness

True Happiness

This unhealthy or worldly sense of values was shown by the Buddha to be something that only brings unhappiness, disappointment, frustration, sorrow, pain, anxieties, and worries. The Buddha pointed out that happiness is to be sought not outside in wealth, status, popularity or sensual pleasures; but rather, inside, through purity of mind. This happiness within is inner peace, calm or tranquility of mind. If one can understand that inner peace is the greatest thing in the world, then one will be feeling inferior only when meeting a calm person. This feeling is rather an admiration and appreciation rather than a feeling of inferiority. Meeting such a calm person becomes an inspiration for us to pursue the goal of calmness ourselves. And if we are really convinced that calmness is the greatest thing, we don't need tranquilizers because tranquilizers are needed only when you are not convinced that calmness is the greatest thing. If calmness is appreciated we automatically begin to pursue this goal and as a result we begin to think, speak, act, and live calmly. Our whole life becomes calm automatically.

Harmonious Goal

Harmonious Goal

It is only when your goal is becoming rich, and you need calmness only to reach that goal, that you need to take a tranquilizer pill. This is because tranquility is not your goal; it is only a means to your goal. Your mind is not tranquil because you are seeking a different goal. It is our sense of values that makes us calm or not calm. You are already familiar with the word "Nirvana," which is regarded as the ultimate goal of the Buddhist. Some think that Nirvana is a kind of Heaven, but Nirvana simply means the Imperturbable Serenity of mind. (nir is the negative prefix like the English "non," and vana means shaking). "Nirvana" is the mind that is not shaken by anything in the world, not even in the face of death. It is the "Unshaken Mind." It is a tranquility of mind which can never be disturbed. That is what "Nirvana" is. All varieties of Buddhist meditation, whether we call it samatha or vipassana, has "Nirvana" as the ultimate goal. This means, if we think that tranquility is the greatest thing in the world, we become Buddhists automatically, as a result. If we think that calmness is not the greatest thing in the world, then we are not Buddhists after all, because we will not be trying to achieve Nirvana. This means, one becomes a Buddhist not by birth or baptism, but by one's sense of values.

Change of Perspective

Change of Perspective

Our change of perspective results in our understanding of the true values of life. This change in our sense of values results in a new goal orientation. When our goal in life changes to tranquility of mind, our thoughts, speech, and actions will fall in line directed towards this goal. You don't have to push yourself to meditate. Meditation will automatically occur in you because meditation is the means to the goal you are pursuing. Your life is going in that direction. You don't have to make any effort. You don't have to make any resolution. You don't need to have will-power to meditate. Willpower is the result of meditation, and not a means to it. You don't have to force yourself to meditate. You don't have to say, "I don't have any time, I have to make time." You will automatically have time because that is what you want to do. If you really want to do something you will have time. You don't have time only when you are not really interested in doing something.

Autonomy

Autonomy

Therefore meditation is automatic to the person who has the Harmonious Perspective, because with the Harmonious Perspective (*samma-ditthi*) arises the Harmonious Goal-orientation (*samma-sankappa*), which automatically leads to Harmonious Speech (*samma-vaca*), Action (*samma-kammanta*), and Lifestyle (*samma-ajiva*). From there on, one makes the effort to purify the mind automatically. This is the Harmonious Practice (*samma-vayama*). This results in the introversion of attention (*satipatthana*). This is the Harmonious Attention (*samma-sati*). This is the beginning of the Sevenfold Process of Awakening (*satta bhogganga*). This introversion of attention leads to seeing what is within (*dhamma vicaya*), which is one's experience within, which is the reaction of the organism to environmental stimulation. When this is achieved, the will power (*viriya*) is developed, and one's mind becomes purified. This makes the mind experience the happiness of selflessness (*piti*). This leads to relaxation of the body (*passaddhi*) and the feeling of comfort that goes with it. This results in tranquility of mind (*samadhi*). This tranquility helps healthy objective introspection (*upekkha*), resulting in true "in-sight (*pañña*)," which is "experiencing experience" and "Awakening" (*sambodhi*) from the "dream of existence" (*bhava nirodha*). This is the freedom from all self-centered emotions (*vimutti*) and sufferings of life (*dukkha nirodha*). This is the "Imperturbable Serenity" (*NIRVANA*).

Awakening

Awakening

To understand more fully the meaning of "awakening from the dream of existence," through "experiencing experience," we need to go into an examination of the deeper meaning of the term *vipassana*. Experience is normally seen as the interaction between a "subject" (the self) and an "object" (in the world outside). The Buddha taught that the experience of "existence," of a subject and an object, is a "delusion." This means "experience precedes existence" (*mano pubbangama dhamma*); that is, "existence" is only an "experience." Experience is the basis of existence. Experience is the ground on which existence stands.

[What is Existence](#)**What is existence**

Normally, we experience the "existence" of a subject (conceived as oneself) and an object (conceived as individuals and things of the world). We (the self) also tend to become emotionally involved with (things of the world). We get involved by forming relationships between the subject (self) and objects (of the world). Because we get involved with the existence of oneself, others, and the relationship, we tend to forget that this existence is only an "experience." We tend to take the "existence" to be very real. This is why the separation from our loved ones makes us so unhappy. This is why the death of a relative or friend results in immense grief and lamentation. When, however, we begin to become aware of the "experience," which is the basis of existence, through *vipassana* meditation, the "existence" is found to be less real. Ultimately we realize that this "existence" is only an illusion (a perceptual fallacy) or more correctly a delusion (a conceptual fallacy). This is the "awakening" (*sambodhi*) from the "dream of existence." This is also called the "cessation of existence," which is Nirvana (*bhava nirodho nibbanam*).

[Lay Person's Meditation](#)**Lay Person's Meditation**

Of course the purpose of our meditation is not to reach that high ideal, which is *Nirvana*. This level of "Awakening from the dream of existence" is a high level of meditation, which is for yogis who have given up the worldly secular life altogether. This is for yogis who have realized the futility and the suffering involved with the secular life. These yogis see that secular life is painful (*dukkha*) because it is mainly based on emotional involvement with objects.

[Yogi's Meditation](#)**Yogi's Meditation**

This point of view of the yogis, however, is not difficult to understand today, because we know that every emotion is self-centered and is accompanied by muscular tension, which is uncomfortable until it is released in action, to get what we want, to get rid of what we hate, or to run away from what we fear. It is this temporary release of tension that is so pleasurable, which keeps us enthralled and enslaved to it. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to release this tension, because we cannot always get what we want, or get rid of what we hate, or run away from what we fear. This unreleased tension gets accumulated and can lead even to a nervous breakdown. This problem is what is called "stress" today. Therefore the aim of the yogi is to get rid of these self-centered emotions and self-centered thinking. Physical relaxation alone does not solve the problem, though, however, it can be a temporary symptomatic treatment.

[Emancipation from Emotion](#)**Emancipation from emotion**

This was why the Buddha showed the way to freedom from this slavery to emotions and suffering. The radical solution of the Buddha was to awaken from the dream of existence and relationship, by learning to focus attention on the experience (*dhamma*) instead of existence (*bhava*). This is a paradigm shift resulting in the experience of impersonal experience, and freedom from the experience of existence. It is the ultimate stage in the evolution of human consciousness. It is *NIRVANA* (*bhava nirodho nibbanam*), the sumum bonum of the Buddhist practice.

[Vipassana is high level](#)**Vipassana is high level**

Vipassana, therefore, is the cultivation of the awareness of experience, instead of the awareness of existence. This definition of *vipassana* might be confusing at the beginning, but it will become clearer as one advances in the practice of

proper *vipassana*. The first step in meditation is to learn to purify the mind, which is the practice of tranquility (*samatha*) meditation. Without cultivating tranquility (*samatha*), it is not possible to practice in-sight (*vipassana*).

Vipassana Not Suited to Lay Person

Vipassana not suited to lay person

This is why *Vipassana* meditation, being a high level of practice, is not applicable in the secular life, which is concerned with self-preservation, propagation of the species, and gratification of the senses. The only kind of meditation suited to secular life is *samatha* or tranquility meditation. It is only when a person is interested in going the whole way, which leads to the awakening from the dream of existence that a person should take up the practice of *vipassana*. This reminds us of what Jesus said: "If you want to go the whole way, sell all your things, give to the poor, and come with me;" and again, "Even if a camel could creep through the eye of a needle, a rich man cannot enter the kingdom of God." It is only when a person is willing to give up everything that *vipassana* proper can be practiced.

Look Before You Leap

Look before you leap

It is important to know what we are doing, before set about doing it. This is why our method of meditation begins with Right Understanding